

## VOWS.

At the opening of the year our thoughts turn to new hopes and new purposes. It is a time of good resolutions and solemn vows. Is it right and wise to pledge ourselves to better conduct and a truer life by registering our resolves in a formal way and calling ourselves and perhaps others to witness to the pledge? Such a vow is of the nature of an oath and appeals to him who "searcheth the heart." It may not be assumed lightly, but it should be assumed as a privilege and to our advantage.

We read little of formal vows in the New Testament. We have, as an example, that rather strange instance of Paul's "having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow"; and of his "purifying himself" with four men at Jerusalem who had assumed vows. But every righteous resolve seriously and reverently formed is of the essential nature of a vow, and these abound throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament formal vows are frequently recorded and sanctioned. David said repeatedly, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."

It is ennobling to definitely form good resolutions; it is strengthening to commit ourselves to them. To sincerely pledge ourselves to the right, fortifies one in his allegiance to righteousness. It more clearly defines his personal obligation; it commits him more firmly to recognized duty; it enlists his endeavors definitely in behalf of a particular cause. Many a boy has turned the scale in favor of manliness, self-respect and a clear conscience, by resolving to be honest and true in the face of temptation. Many a Christian has been sustained as a witness-bearer for Christ by intelligently and prayerfully resolving to maintain Christian principle, however severely tested. Having once taken his stand resolutely, his integrity is preserved; having planted his feet firmly on the rock of principle, he remains unmoved; having espoused a worthy cause, he becomes its righteous patron, its recognized advocate and avowed defender.

It is not only a noble, but an ennobling, thing for the business man, at a time when questionable business methods prevail, to resolutely determine that his business shall be conducted on the basis of the Golden Rule. It is not only praiseworthy, but it is refining and elevating, for a member of society to determine that in the midst of that which is conventional and insincere in social life, he will cultivate a generous, frank and deferential spirit. It gives fiber to moral manhood, infuses iron into the blood, to resolutely determine to maintain an attitude of uncompromising hostility to any form of moral degeneracy. And when we lift the principle to the yet higher plane of spiritual relations, it becomes distinctly a means of grace to commit ourselves by act or by profession to the holy cause of service and faith to which we are called.

The value of forming good resolutions, however, is dependent on conditions. An intelligent appreciation of the obligation which is assumed is essential, there can be little merit in resolving to perform duty if there is an inadequate estimate of the dignity of the duty

to be performed. To pledge oneself to be energetic and prompt in business, while one has no just estimate of the value of business methods, is to invite failure; and to pledge oneself to integrity, while believing that duplicity will serve his purposes better, is a mockery. A just apprehension of moral relations is essential to moral attainment and a prerequisite of righteous reform. The mind must address itself to the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report.

Another condition which is essential to the assumption of high moral obligation is that the heart shall be enlisted in the performance of the duties that are assumed. To pledge oneself to repellant tasks may be a source of weakness, rather than of strength. If holiness is offensive to the moral vision, the eyes will turn away to other objects, however boldly the lips may have uttered their vows. The wine bibber, in Proverbs, with the evils of his debauchery overwhelming him, says: "I will seek it yet again." If moral rectitude is to be a rule of conduct, it must be the ideal of the inmost soul. The spirit must respond to the appeal of spiritual beauty. If the character is to be symmetrical and strong, it must not only apprehend righteous laws, but must covet earnestly the best gifts.

The two conditions existing, a clear understanding of moral rectitude and an appetency toward that which is excellent, we may well regard it as a privilege to pledge ourselves solemnly to earnest endeavor toward the attainment of life's high ideals. It is noble to sincerely avow purposes of fidelity to the sacred duties of life; to devoutly avow allegiance to Him whose covenants have been so graciously kept with us, and to determine that by his continued favor we will be more faithful to him in the days to come than we have been in the past. It is a privilege to profess our admiration for his person, our belief of his word, our confidence in his redeeming work, our dependence on his grace, and to solemnly pledge ourselves, as his servants, to new obedience.

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT.

Besides the elimination of the doctrine of sin from much of the preaching of the day there is another elimination which follows very closely upon it. It is that of the personal element in preaching. Little thought being given to the sin, as little is given to the sinner. The pressing home of truth, even though it be uncomfortable truth, is not fashionable. This is a serious loss. The sermon is a means to an end. Its object is to bring the Word of God and the human soul into contact. Presenting the truth only in the form of generalization, and with no attempt to make it direct and personal, the preacher does not make it a part of his hearer's life. The fear that it will be offensive does not seem to be the cause of this so much as the fashion of the day. Men are not offended by the bringing home to them of wholesome truth if it be brought with tenderness and love and accompanied with a gracious offer of pardon and righteousness through Christ. God takes care of that side of the problem. And even if it offend, it is still the duty of the preacher to declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear.